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Social justice and educational delights
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Social justice and educational delights

(1) *The value of formal education*

The reasons that individuals find value in formal education are both instrumental and intrinsic.. Firstly, it can give people an entry into some desired occupation, status or role. To give just one example, education has long been used – and still is – as a path to money, power and status. Through the ages and all over the world clever boys (and a very few girls) born in relative poverty have been able to use education as a means to high status, power and/or wealth. This seems to have been true even in societies where high status positions were mostly inherited, as in Ancient China or Egypt, as well as in more meritocratic ones such as medieval China. Secondly, there is another kind of value altogether. Education can be valued in and for itself. In English this kind of value lies behind calls for liberal education; in the influential German language tradition it is found in *Bildung*. Again, this kind value seems to be found in a wide range of societies, across time and all over the world.

The relation between these two sets of values is complex. In some respects they are opposed. The first views the purpose of education as a means to an objective. The second takes the processes of education to be at least as important as any objectives. To put this another way, in the case of the first, the end determines the means. In the second, any outcomes are not determinable from the beginning because they evolve from the process of education. In other respects the two are linked. There are cases where the knowledge needed to enter some desired occupation is also knowledge that can be valued for itself (e.g. see Pring, 1993). Equally somebody who has learnt something for its own sake can find that it has led to high status, wealth or power. Sometimes individuals are more motivated by one of these and then during the course of their education become more motivated by the other. A person may approach education for vocational or instrumental reasons and then find that it has become something personally valuable. This might be compared with another familiar human experience. A person entering a relationship for sexual or instrumental reasons can find they have unexpectedly fallen in love. Others choose not to continue with areas of education they find more personally fulfilling in order to ensure their future career prospects. This too can be compared to a familiar human experience. A person who has married for love may find over the course of time that they stay with their partner only because they cannot afford to leave.

So far, the focus of the argument has been on the individual learner. The value accorded to education by a society follows the same pattern as the value it is accorded individually. For education is never just individual. It always affects and is affected by the society in which it occurs. The education of both children and adults is an intrinsic part of any human society. Firstly there is an obvious value in that education is one way in which a society reproduces itself and develops. This may be thought of as ‘a production model’ (Martin, 1985) of education and it applies to the educational proposals of Plato, Rousseau and Dewey. In these proposals social justice is relevant. Plato, Rousseau and Dewey, were all interested in creating a just society and argued that its creation and maintenance required a specific kind of education. Secondly, education may be valued for itself in a society, quite apart from its contribution to the overall shape of the society. It is not only that societies need an educated public and educated rulers. They also value them for their education. *Institutions* of education may also be valued for themselves. To take an example, Scotland is proud of its

education: its schools and its universities. I think this valuation is independent of their contribution to the economic and political life of the country.

(2) Social justice and education: the usual account

Issues of social justice pervade formal education, concerned, as both are, with values and the good life. In relation to formal education, social justice may refer to justice *from* education or justice *in* education. Currently social justice is discussed in terms of the three analytically separable factors which are not specifically educational. They are (1) distribution of wealth, status and power (2) 'recognition' of worth, regardless of differences such as religion or sexuality and (3) association. Each of these factors may refer to justice *from* education: what happens to individuals or society *as a result of* education. They may also refer to justice *in* education: what happens to individuals during their education or to a society in which specific educational practices occur. This is the usual account of social justice and formal education. It is an account that I accept and, indeed, have had a hand in telling ([name], 1998, 2003).

The three factors in social justice have not been thought relevant to all societies. Distributive justice is an exception, since it applies in any community in which there are social differences. In the West the discussion has been influenced by Aristotle (Aristotle, 1995) and, recently, by Rawls (Rawls, 1971). Rawls argues that:

Social and economic inequalities, for example inequalities of wealth and authority, are just only if they result in compensating benefits for everyone, and in particular for the least advantaged members of society. (Rawls, 1971, pp. 14-15)

Secondly, where universal equality is socially valued, recognition becomes an issue. It is concerned with how persons are regarded by others. Fraser (1997) analyses how this relates to distributive justice. She explains recognition in the context of cultural or symbolic injustice:

Here injustice is rooted in social patterns of representation interpretation, and communication. Examples include cultural domination...; nonrecognition (being rendered invisible by means of the...practices of one's culture); and disrespect. (1997, p. 14)

Finally, within a democratic society, as Young (2006) has argued, a just society requires that people can and do form creative, diverse and fluid associations. She is referring to adult civil society but the argument is also relevant within institutions of education ([name] and Ross, 2008).

Different social groups of people may suffer injustice of some or all of these kinds, including lack of opportunity and unethical treatment. The list of such groups is, notoriously, not only long but also shifting. The most usually mentioned, these days, include gender, race, social class, sexuality and disability. These commonly feature in education policies along with a range of other differences, including religious, international, rural/city, settled/travelling/migrant and so on and on.

(3) The case of distributive justice and social class

How do the values of education map onto the values of social justice for individuals and groups? Clearly this is a very complex question. To begin to answer it I focus on one factor and one group. I have chosen to focus specifically on distributive justice in relation to social class.

I choose distributive justice because it is a focus of educational policy, no doubt partly because achievement is relatively easy to measure. I could have discussed other factors often mentioned in relation to distributive justice, such as race and gender. I choose to discuss social class partly because I think it is sometimes downplayed in comparison to race and gender. It is even difficult to talk about it. As patterns of employment have changed, old definitions need to be updated. In educational discourse ‘poverty’ is often the preferred term. Teachers regularly use surrogates for social class, like ‘nice’ or ‘rough’ school/ neighbourhood/ background. It is sometimes asserted that the issue is out of date since, it is claimed, ‘we are all middle class now’. However, not-so-fair distribution in terms of class continues. As Cristina Iannelli and Lindsay Paterson from the Centre for Educational Sociology (CES) at Edinburgh point out:

...in Scotland over the past half century...social class differences in educational attainment have not significantly reduced. (Iannelli & Paterson, 2005, p. 1)

The question then arises as to why do these inequalities matter in relation to the value of education. What is it that is so good about education that lack of it is an injustice? The question is sharpened by considering the full quotation. In the previous excerpt I deliberately left out some of the quotation, while not distorting it. The full paragraph with the omission italicized reads:

Educational attainment has increased in Scotland over the past half century. *Nevertheless*, social class differences in educational attainment have not significantly reduced. (Iannelli & Paterson, 2005, p. 1)

As another publication by the CES team expressed the question:

Is the value of education intrinsic, such that everyone may benefit from its expansion, or is it a positional good whose value declines if others possess more of it? (Raffe, Croxford, Iannelli, Shapira & Howieson, 2006, p. 1)

It is relevant for the argument of this paper that positional goods notably include status, wealth and power – and educational achievement and experience is one route to all of these. In one way distributive justice might seem to require that educational attainment should be evenly distributed across class. In another way distributive justice is well served if social class disparity continues, but the least advantaged have benefited by their increased attainments.

The question is more even complex than it appears at first sight. There are two possible interpretations of ‘everyone’ and there are three possible interpretations of ‘benefit’. I have illustrated this in the following matrix:

	Benefit: As a result of education		Benefit: Education in itself
	Non competitive	Competitive	
Everyone: All Individuals	Ai	Aii	C
Everyone: society as a whole	Bi	Bii	D

The first possibility, A, is one in which each individual will benefit from education. A student will develop the skills, attitudes or knowledge that will be wanted or needed later. These may be non-competitive (Ai). For instance, it is useful to learn to cook or to speak a foreign language. (I take it that this is what the CES team means by ‘intrinsic benefit’). Or they may be competitive (Aii). For instance, if passing some specific examination is a condition for obtaining access to some good, then it will benefit the individual to pass it.

The second possibility, B, is one in which society as a whole will benefit from having an educated population. The Council of the European Union’s resolution on lifelong learning expresses this view particularly clearly. It begins as follows (CEU, 2002, para 1):

Education and training are an indispensable means of promoting social cohesion, active citizenship, personal and professional fulfilment, adaptability and employability. Lifelong learning facilitates free mobility for European citizens and allows the achievement of the goals and aspirations of European Union countries (i.e. to become more prosperous, competitive, tolerant and democratic). It should enable all persons to acquire the necessary knowledge to take part as active citizens in the knowledge society and the labour market.

In short, for the CEU, education is essentially for something else, be it social cohesion or personal fulfilment - which are non-competitive (Bi). Alternatively it may be for employability or a more prosperous country – which more are likely to require selection and competition (Bii).

In both A and B, benefits are a result of education. In other words education is conceived of as a ‘subordinate practice’, a phrase I take from Hogan (Hogan, 2009, p. 8). This can be contrasted with the possibilities marked C and D. In the first, C, an individual values her education for itself while in the second, D, a society values its institutions of education regardless of their use for other purposes.

Concerns about distributive social justice in education are focused on A and B: with benefits which accrue as a result of education, competitive or not. Attention to the distribution of any intrinsic benefits in education is very largely missing. Given this significant gap I want to explore how far education, formal education, is also a good in itself.

I suggest that a focus on the benefit of education as a good in itself is to see it as one of the joys of a good life – and one which should be justly distributed. I am conscious how odd it may seem to bring the words ‘joy’ and ‘education’ together! I wonder if this is precisely because education is so often assumed to be *for* something, and so is taken to be a worthy business, something that ought to be done. One reason that I use the word ‘joy’ is that I have long been struck by Robin Richardson’s way of explaining why we might care about justice. He says:

Not that justice is an end in itself. Its purpose is to make the world safer for hope, love and rejoicing. Justice and joy: each is the ground and the fruit of the other. (Richardson, 1996, p. 20)

Richardson is following a tradition that goes back at least as far as Aristotle. In the *Politics*, one of the most influential books on social justice in Western thought, Aristotle said:

The good life is the chief end both for the community as a whole and for each of us individually. (*Politics III*, 6, 1278b6)

And:

The good in the sphere of politics is justice. (*Politics III*, 11, 1282b14)

For Aristotle, the good life is marked by *eudaimonia* which is variously translated as ‘joy’, ‘flourishing’, and, with some reservations, ‘happiness’. (It should, of course, be distinguished from pleasure or fun.)

Where is such a good to be found in every day life? For guidance here, I turn to Hannah Arendt. In a famous passage in *The Human Condition*, she says:

How do we know what is good, where to find hope, love, rejoicing, joy?

What I propose is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing. (Arendt, 1958, p. 5)

(4) *Delights in teaching*

Arendt’s proposal may be simple and right. We educators should indeed be thinking what we are doing in education to find hope, love, rejoicing and joy. Carrying out the proposal out is not so simple. Words like ‘rejoicing’ and ‘joy’ are rather grand and it is somewhat daunting to consider instances of them in personal narrative of one’s own ordinary life in order to think about them. However, I intend to try and it is to my own personal narrative that I now want to turn - though I will not use the term ‘joy’. Rather, I shall think of ‘delight’, which is more accessible. (I should mention that I am influenced here by J.B. Priestley’s lovely but little known book, *Delight*.)

In what follows, I attend, thoughtfully, to delight *in* education in order to tease out where it occurs. This being potentially a very large topic (even if delight and education are rarely discursively connected these days), I focus on one small element. I focus on some of my own delights as a teacher, on what delights *me* – *this* teacher - in formal education, as a way of *beginning* to get clear about the intrinsic value of teaching and formal education. The delights of learning could have been another starting point. But I consider teaching for two reasons. First, I want to draw on autobiography here and I might be considered unusual as a learner, given my career in education. There is no reason to think I am unusual as a teacher. Second, with Biesta (2007), I think it is time to draw attention to the significance of teaching. Over the last couple of decades, ‘learning’ has become universally approved, while the role of a teacher, if not eliminated altogether in ‘self-study’ is too often narrowed down to ‘facilitation’, ‘mentoring’ or ‘knowledge transfer’.

It is necessary to affirm that I do not think that I am representative of everyone. This is a beginning, the first word not the last.

Certainly, then, ordinary language is not the last word: in principle it can everywhere be supplemented and improved upon and superseded. Only remember, it *is* the *first* word. (Austin, 1961, p. 185)

Austin was talking about the words of ordinary language, but the point is also relevant to descriptions of ordinary experiences. My representation of my own personal narrative is subject to critique on a number of grounds (Griffiths and Macleod, 2008), but, if supplemented by others’ narratives, and always mindful of the critique, it may be useful in challenging and disrupting settled understandings of education and justice.

4.1 Pedagogical relationship.

As a teacher I delight in my pedagogical relationships. In a time when teaching, like many other professional relationships, is so often conceptualised in the terminology of client or customer, it is especially important to emphasise the specificity of pedagogical relationships. Pedagogical relationships can be distinguished from relationships with family, friends and neighbours on the one hand and with customers, clients and patients on the other; though of course we may be in more than one relationship with any particular individual. Like family relationships and friendships, pedagogical relationships are irreducibly individual. Like other professional relationships, pedagogical relationships carry specific obligations and are subject to regulation. But such similarities can be overemphasised.

My concern here is delight. I am not putting forward a general theory of pedagogical relationships. Nevertheless, I necessarily make some theoretical assumptions. I note that I am departing from that influential Germanic tradition of writing about pedagogy which begins with the assumption that learners are children and teachers are adults (Spieker, 1984; van Manen, 1994). Equally I am departing from accounts of pedagogy which subsume it in generalised ethical relationships, be they symmetrical or otherwise (Fritzell, 1996, Joldersma, 2001).

What is it in this relationship that gives delight? As Nehemas argues for the relationship of friendship, human relationships are never completely specifiable. They are best understood through auto/biographical stories of which one can then say 'and so on' (Nehemas, 2008a; N008b). (Also see van Manen, 1994.) Accordingly, I begin my exploration of the delights of pedagogical relationships with my own experience. I give three examples from my experiences of teaching different ages and phases. I reflect on my pedagogical relationships with a doctoral student, an undergraduate, and some six year olds.

One of my doctoral students, Pamela Stagg-Jones was awarded her doctorate by Edinburgh University in 2008. This was no ordinary day for her. I have the photograph of her as she left the McEwan Hall after the ceremony, holding the certificate and shouting with what looks like a mixture of joy and triumph. As she expressed it in her journal (Stagg-Jones, 2008) remembering her feelings during the ceremony, 'I am really beginning to fly with this feeling of sheer joy'. However, the relevant point here is my delight not hers. Pam had been a friend before she was my student. Both of us took care to distinguish times when we were acting as one or the other. I was her supervisor over the long period of supervision (she was a part-time student), watching and helping as she met various intellectual challenges. I had tried to support her continuing progress while she coped with a range of crises ranging from hurricanes to being diagnosed with very serious illness. I had enjoyed working out with her what to make of her developing theories, and also enjoyed the fact that she did not make of them what I did. I had irritably gone on and on about proof-reading. All of this was a delight, even including (and, perhaps, especially including) the difficulties and irritations. I was delighted to be there to witness her award, because she was my student - far more than if she were simply my friend.

Such delight is not confined to PhD teaching. Nor is it short lived and easily forgotten. Twenty years ago I was teaching an education course on control issues in

education to first year undergraduates (only some of whom were wanting to become teachers). The courses in that university were modular and I met these students, for just ten sessions over the course of one module. I do not remember them all, and I have an awful memory for names. However I do remember Jenny because of an educational delight associated with her. Far from being a friend, she was not a student who I particularly took to (or against, for that matter). We did not keep in touch during the rest of her degree course, for instance. Jenny had a hard time coming to terms with the way we taught the concept of educational control. Put simply, it involved us handing over a lot of control of the course to the students. They had to organize themselves and their learning; part of their assessment was a self-assessed group exercise. If the group gave itself a high enough mark that would be enough to give all its members a bare pass even without the addition of their (individual) examination marks. We did not moderate those results. The experience was intended to challenge their beliefs about how control works in relation to the organisation and assessment of learning. Jenny did not see the point of any of this at the start. She did not see it half-way through the module either. Perhaps this was partly because she was a mature, hardworking, committed student, whose previous employment was in a very controlled and hierarchical profession, where individual hard work and commitment counted for a lot. I remember her disquiet and I remember that we had extended discussions about how (if) she could come to terms with it. Mostly I remember that we developed a relationship based on this pedagogical issue and I was personally delighted when she found a resolution extending her views about learning and control, as well as merely obtaining a grade she was happy enough with.

Such delight is also to be found when teaching children. Here I particularly want to distinguish between the delight of being with young children and pedagogical delight. I helped to teach six year olds in Maine, USA, for two months in 1988, working alongside the classroom teacher, Robin. We travelled to school together each morning, half an hour by car in the snow. On the way we talked intensely, as teachers do, about the children: what they were learning, what they enjoyed, their social/cultural relations with us and each other, their homes, and their negotiations with the culture of the classroom. My own preoccupations were about how individual children approached science, art, number, writing and reading - and how my interventions helped in some of these areas. I was interested in what engaged the children and for how long. Our relationships with these children were primarily pedagogical, rather than an interest in their lives and families. I realized just how intense this relationship with them must have been when Robin wrote to me ten years later with a person by person up-date of the children in the class: not so much their personal lives but rather their educational ones. Far from being bored by an account of some children I had met for just two months, ten years before, I devoured it.

From this short exploration I can draw some very tentative conclusions about my delight in a pedagogical relationship. Delight seems to come from a relationship which is intense, heartfelt, but, interestingly, independent of liking (or friendship). It is focused on particular individuals, rather than on classes or generalities. Finally it is related to my own self-identity, and recognition of my own responsibility towards the students. The relationship is with 'my' students: I am 'their' teacher.

4.2 *Learning*

I have been describing something of delight in the pedagogical relationship. learning is central, not surprisingly, since it is a *pedagogical* relationship. So I now turn to consider the delight of seeing students learn.

In my account of Pam I mentioned intellectual challenges. That she had met them successfully was central to my delight in her progress. She had begun writing what was essentially polemic, resulting from her experiences as a headteacher in the eighties. By the end of the course she was able to defend her views in a range of ways rather than simply to assert them vigorously. More than this, she had been surprised to find that she had changed those initial views in some important respects precisely as a result of arguing about them and listening to alternatives. She has learnt to recognise a good argument from a bad one, the significance of good grammar, and to deal with critiques of her dearly held beliefs. All this is a continuing source of delight to me. Pam herself recognised that learning was central to the whole process. In her journal she describes various reasons that she was so pleased, including that of proving her school teachers wrong. But she goes on:

I did it all for the love of learning, for the love of philosophy, for the pulsating drive to understand and truly know my own thinking on so many difficult and challenging ideas in education. (Stagg-Jones, 2008, p. 2)

I myself would not have been much interested in proving her teachers wrong. But I was delighted to teach her to work at doctoral level, something I believe to be worthwhile.

Learning is equally important in my delight with the experience of teaching the children in Maine. I described this in an article I wrote when I was back from the USA ([name], 1990):

Kira is six. She skips across the classroom, looking as if she is floating above the floor. I am floating myself. She has just managed to count out a pile of beans equal in number to the calendar date; divide it into two piles; count each half and write down the result in an addition sum. She has got all this right for the first time this morning, after a month's effort by both of us. I had forgotten how the delight in teaching comes from these small – I should say, huge! – triumphs. Kira's progress in numbers; Jarod's new-found thrill in writing stories; Cassie's discovery of the world of natural science.

What I am emphasizing in this section is that delight in a pedagogical relationship comes from students' *learning*. My examples were about learning number, and learning to take a critical attitude. It also seems from the examples that such delight is enhanced when it is learning achieved with difficulty as a result of teaching. It comes from helping to bring about learning (i.e. to teach), but especially when it is learning something both difficult and worthwhile.

4.3 *Becoming and entrancement*

My third and fourth delights derive from students 'becoming' – transformations of self that occur during learning – and 'entrancement' – students discovering an engagement with a subject matter or skill. In using these terms it is clear that I am making assumptions about the nature of learning. Terms such as these assume an uncertain learning: unpredictable, not specifiable, unbounded. These assumptions are very far from the well-known metaphors of learning as a seed becoming a plant, or as moulding some material to a desirable shape. And they are very far from the kind of

certainty of learning implicit in stated objectives and outcomes that are measurable using performance indicators and tick boxes. Of course there is a pleasure to be found in helping people gain specifiable skills and knowledge: to be able to count, or to get gerunds in the right place. But it is not this kind of learning which delights me. Delight comes from teaching so that students gain something more unforeseeable, open-ended; something that depends on and contributes to who they are as individuals.

Sometimes my students became what they were not previously, and what I could not predict. This is a delight to watch and to be part of. Pamela wrote (Stagg-Jones, 2008, p. 2), 'I am becoming someone new.' This was not just a feeling. Since obtaining the doctorate she persuaded a local authority in Florida to take seriously a course (drawing on her doctorate) she described as being about metaphysics, metaphor and metamorphosis. This is something she could not have done before. Nor is it something that either she or I could have predicted. Similarly the children in Maine had become embryonic scientists, writers and arithmeticians. I had not expected Cassie to become so interested in natural history. Her drawing reading and writing moved from being dutiful to enthusiastic as she learnt about penguins and polar bears. I had not expected Jarod, who had been finding difficulty in his school work, and especially in writing, to become such a good producer of books. (We all looked forward to them.)

To use Pádraig Hogan's memorable phrase, all these students, adults and children, were noticing, and then learning to inhabit, new imaginative neighbourhoods (Hogan, 2009). Pam had entered a neighbourhood of metaphor and metamorphosis; Jenny of concepts of control and discipline – and, I think, of experiential learning. In Maine, Kira had entered a new imaginative neighbourhood of numbers, Jarod of story writing and Cassie of natural history.

4.4 Beginning to name some pedagogical delights

These examples are just a beginning. They are only stories told from the perspective of a teacher and they are all told by just one teacher. A longer paper would address questions of their validity ([name] and Macleod, 2008). It would be important to consider issues such as representativeness, representation, genre, and reflexivity. For instance, there are questions to be addressed about how the stories were chosen, how the students have been represented in relation to myself, why they are all success stories, and my own positionality within the analysis.

There are only three stories here. However, they are about a range of learners as well as a range of delights. They are also, I hope, stories of delights that will resonate with other teachers. If so they may be the beginning of a shared enterprise of attending to educational delights: to sources of joy in education. The beginning as I have presented it here suggests the following delights as significant:

- The pedagogical relationship
- Learning
- Becoming
- Entrancement

If these are a sound beginning then they would also provide a starting place for identifying where justice is to be found (or not) with regard to the intrinsic value of education.

(5) *Educational values and social justice*

The purpose in this paper has been to challenge a view of social justice in education which either concentrates narrowly on what education is *for*, rather than what it is (justice as distributive or associational), or alternatively, finds in education general ethical precepts that are not, however, specifically educational (justice as recognition).

Although my overall concern is with formal education generally, with both teaching and learning, I have been focussing on teaching. Naturally, in discussing teaching I have indicated how delight in teaching has its corollary in learning. I would suggest that the profound delight to be found in teaching has its counterpart in a delight in learning something difficult and worthwhile, as part of a pedagogical relationship: a kind of learning which transforms the self in unpredictable ways, partly because it opens up the possibility of entrancement in new imaginative neighbourhoods.

The usual account of social justice needs to be enlarged. Earlier, I pointed out that I myself subscribe to an account of social justice in education which pertains to education as a subordinate practice. Such subordination is in order. Some of the things to which education is subordinate are themselves valuable. However, the usual account is a partial one. Education is valuable in itself, and some of the other worthwhile ways of being and doing should, in turn, be subordinate to it. For instance, education may help secure a flourishing economy on one hand, and a responsible citizenry on the other. At the same time, both the economy and responsible citizenship need to be subordinate to education insofar as it gives a point to having a flourishing economy and a responsible citizenry.

Not everyone experiences the benefits of an education for itself. There must be many reasons for this. Whatever the reasons, missing out on the chance to delight in education is an injustice. Such injustice is unlikely to be merely individual chance. For instance, I suspect that delights in formal education are correlated with social class. But that would be the topic for another investigation. It could start with a shared project of identifying delights in education; exploring how far my analyses of my few stories resonate with those of others. Meanwhile it remains important to work for social justice for a range of instrumental reasons. My argument here is that it is important for *educational* reasons too, because of the significance that a good education has in itself, regardless of instrumental considerations.

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